

## Behavioral Healthcare Leaders Share Strategies and Inspire Collaboration at the Council's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration



“Stigma hurts and it’s loud, but it’s not stronger than the truth and it’s not stronger than community. We are building a state where mental health is not whispered about with shame, where seeking help is a sign of strength. Each of us plays a role in ending stigma,” stated Renee Burawski, LCSW, Assistant Commissioner, New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, at the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Showcase of the New Jersey Governor’s Council on Mental Health Stigma earlier this week.

When the Council was launched in 2005, “We really did hit the ground running. It was very rewarding to do that work, to help create a foundation, and to now see the Council reinvigorated, doing so much work with these Stigma-Free Zones and other initiatives,” stated Elsa Candelario DSW, MSSW, LCSW, who was the inaugural Chair of the Council. Dr. Candelario noted that it takes 17 years from the time research is developed to its implementation on the ground. “Implementation science is trying to do something about that, but I don’t think we need to wait for scientists to fix it. We can shorten the span of those 17 years by taking these messages home with us,” said Dr. Candelario, who currently serves as Professor of Professional Practice and Director of the LISTA Certificate Program, Rutgers University School of Social Work and Vice Chair of the New Jersey Mental Health Institute Board of Trustees.

During the keynote presentation, *Beating the Stigma of Mental Illness*, Patrick Corrigan, PsyD, MA, Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Illinois Institute of Technology, shared compelling examples of stigma that heightened everyone’s awareness of its harmful impact, and strategies and resources for eliminating stigma and discrimination. “Stigma is not an issue of illness or medicine. It’s an issue of social justice,” Dr. Corrigan stated. He explained that contact with individuals who have mental illnesses is more effective than just education for changing attitudes and behaviors. This relates to the Council’s efforts to encourage individuals to share personal success stories. Click [here](#) for details on the opportunity to do so.

Debra L. Wentz, PhD, Chair of the Council and President/CEO of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies (NJAMHAA), and Shauna Moses, NJAMHAA’s Vice President of Public Affairs and Member Services, presented on the history of the Council and its initiatives and impact since its inception in 2005.

Another initiative of the Council to engage people in education that inspires others is the [Sing! for Mental Health Project](#). “We have to have continual new projects to bring in more people. Otherwise, we’re just preaching to the choir,” stated Cynthia Chazen, Coordinator of Community Outreach and Partnerships for the Council, who conceptualized this project. “We’re asking people to step up, be advocates and educate their communities about mental health.” The project highlights unique efforts that incorporate mental health education and inspiration

through visual and performing arts. To further inspire attendees, Lynette Sheard and Donnaiee Barnes, Director and Coordinator, respectively, of the Mental Health Association in New Jersey's Mental Health Players, gave an uplifting musical and poetry performance with a powerful message of hope and resilience.

The event also featured two panel discussions: one on the Council's Stigma-Free Zone Learning Collaborative, moderated by Susan Tellone, RN, MSN, CSN, Council Member, Founder of Thriving Minds and Resiliency Advocate and Executive Director of The Samaritan Center at the Jersey Shore; and one on serving individuals with both mental illnesses and intellectual/developmental disabilities, moderated by Deborah M. Spitalnik, PhD, Founder and Former Executive Director of The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development.

### **Congratulations to the Award Recipients!**

Council Chair Debra L. Wentz, PhD, recognized longtime and newer leaders and initiatives striving to eliminate stigma.



**Robert N. Davison, MA, LPC, Chief Executive Officer, Mental Health Association, *Golden Leadership in the Fight against Stigma Award*:** As Chair of Governor Richard Codey's Task Force on Mental Health, "Bob did not waste a minute. In just a few months, he led the task force in developing recommendations to improve the mental healthcare system in New Jersey. One of the proposals was to establish this Council," Dr. Wentz said.



**David Jacobs, Council Member and President/Owner, Olde Tyme Syrups & Sundae Toppings, *Role Model for Fighting Stigma Award*:** "From experiencing disability in his own family, David has endless motivation and determination, as well as innovative, strategic thinking to help individuals live independently and lead the best lives possible. In fact, it was his brainchild that the Council should focus on individuals who have both mental illnesses and intellectual or developmental disabilities, and we are continuing work in this area," Dr. Wentz stated.



**Assistant Commissioner Renee Burawski, *State Champion in the Fight against Stigma Award*:** "Renee's support of the Governor's Council means the world in the fight against stigma," Dr. Wentz said.

"Without having the state behind us, we would not be able to accomplish nearly as much as we have," Dr. Wentz added.



**Dr. Elsa Candelario, *Extraordinary Leader in Fighting Stigma Award*:** “We are recognizing Elsa as the Council’s inaugural chair and the positive impact she has achieved in her current roles,” Dr. Wentz said.

“She is a very practical, roll-up-your-sleeves leader, a staunch advocate and extremely creative in increasing access and fighting stigma,” Dr. Wentz added.



**Sylvia Axelrod (in memoriam), Former Council Chair and Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness-New Jersey Chapter, *Legacy Award for Anti-Stigma Leadership*:** “Sylvia served as the second chair of the Council and as the first Executive Director of NAMI New Jersey,” Dr. Wentz shared. “The Council was her heart and soul from 2005 to 2018. She was a wonderful spokesperson and leader, and an amazing pillar of strength.” Daxe and Scott Axelrod accepted the award in honor of their mother.



**Oaks Integrated Care, *Organizational Champion in the Fight against Stigma Award*:** Derry Holland, LCSW, Chief Executive Officer of Oaks Integrated Care and NJAMHAA Board Secretary, accept this award for her organization. “In addition to significant expansion of this organization into several counties, Derry’s leadership led to the creation of Oaks’ [Stop the Stigma campaign](#). This is quite a tribute to Derry as she incarnates the culture of ending stigma and making all services accessible to everyone,” Dr. Wentz stated.



**Susan Tellone, *Exemplary Leader in Fighting Stigma and Preventing Suicide Award*:** “Susan is always about doing more. She jumped right in from the time she was appointed to the Council, chairs the Stigma-Free Zone subcommittee and volunteers to speak at community events. Susan is also a powerful advocate for mental health and a widely recognized expert on suicide prevention,” Dr. Wentz said.

Please click [here](#) to watch a video of his event.